

HOWARD UNIVERSITY
WASHINGTON, D. C.

SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
DEPARTMENT OF SURGERY

January 13, 1947

The Editor
Journal of the American Medical Association
535 N. Dearborn Street
Chicago, Illinois

Dear Sir:

In the January 11, 1947 Journal on page 101 under the general title, "History of the American Medical Association," there is a chapter, "Admission of Negro Delegates," which is worthy of comment.

The material of this chapter is taken from the minutes of the Twenty-First Annual Session of the American Medical Association held in Washington, D. C. in 1870.

The essence of the chapter is that by a vote of 115 to 90 men from the Department of Medicine of Howard University and Freedmen's Hospital were barred from membership.

Today, seventy-seven years later, this ruling still stands. I shall not argue the case for admission as it stood in 1870, but I do feel that this age-long policy of discrimination under what guise or pretext is one of the dark pages in the history of an organization which otherwise has many bright ones.

In 1870 Howard University was but three years old. Its professors, to a large degree, were large-souled physicians of the northern army who, while administering to the sick who came under their care through the Freedmen's Bureau, gave their time, often at great personal sacrifice and with rare devotion, in helping men who were but recently slaves to learn to assist the sick and afflicted of their race. Rejected by the District Medical Society, they helped form the National Medical Society so that there would be some medium for expression of their common problems and aims. Your pages now recite the story of their rejection by the American Medical Association.

The men in Washington, the nation's capital, are still rejected although there can be no doubt of their qualifications by any standards, and so likewise are all of the Negro physicians who happen to live in the South.

At Howard University for many years no physician has been considered for a position of professorial or associate professor rank in the preclinical area who has not earned a Ph. D. in his special field. In Freedmen's Hospital, the teaching hospital for the clinical years, a man must have successfully passed his specialty board to be considered for the position of assistant professor. The chief of every department and subdivision in the departments is a certified specialist in name and practice. Match these standards with those of the great hospitals of the land and they will be found good, but it will not grant them the privilege of discussing common problems with fellow physicians in the learned councils of the American Medical Association now celebrating its one hundredth birthday. One hundred years of racial bigotry and fatuous pretense; one hundred years of gross disinterest in a large section of the American people whose medical voice it purports to be - as regards the problem of Negroes which it raised in 1870; one hundred years with no progress to report. A sorry record.

The American Specialty Boards accept a man on the basis of merit; the American College of Surgeons has recently erased the infamous policy of discrimination and has made a man's ethical and surgical standards the sole measuring rod; the International Colleges open their doors to men of like training and interests regardless of race or nationality; but not the great American Medical Association. If a small minority of county or state chapters persist in wagging the whole body, and the body as a whole makes no move to direct its own destiny, then it must be considered a body without true strength and purpose or one which likes the way it is going. The American Medical Association should not start its second century with unfinished business of this kind making mockery of its continuous protestations of leadership in medicine under the great and free American way of life.

Very truly yours,

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